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UNCLASSIFIED

SIPDIS
TELEGRAM

April 07, 2004

To: No Action Addressee
Action: Unknown
From: AMEMBASSY ABU DHABI (ABU DHABI 1055 - ROUTINE)
TAGS: CVIS, CMGT, PREL, KPAO
Captions: None
Subject: YOU LOSE ONE, YOU LOSE THEM ALL - UAE STUDENTS CONTINUE
TO AVOID THE US DUE TO VISA AND BORDER PROCEDURES.
Ref: None

UNCLAS ABU DHABI 01055

SIPDIS
CXABU:
ACTION: AMB
INFO: ECON PAO CONS DCM
Laser1:
INFO: PAO CONS

DISSEMINATION: AMB
CHARGE: PROG

APPROVED: DCM:RALBRIGHT
DRAFTED: CON:TPONCE
CLEARED: PAO:HOLSIN-WINDECKER; CON:MMARRANO; ECON: OJOHN

VZCZCADI641
RR RUEHC RUEHXX ALSAC
DE RUEHAD #1055/01 0981236
ZNR UUUUU ZZH
R 071236Z APR 04
FM AMEMBASSY ABU DHABI
TO RUEHC/SECSTATE WASHDC 3882
INFO RUEHXX/ARAB ISRAELI COLLECTIVE
ALSAC/ALL SOUTH ASIA COLLECTIVE

UNCLAS SECTION 01 OF 02 ABU DHABI 001055

SIPDIS

DEPARTMENT FOR NEA/PPD; NEA/PI; NEA/ARP; NEA/FO; ECA;
IIP/G/NESA; CA/EX; CA/VO; CA/PPD

REF: 03 ABU DHABI 04315; 03 ABU DHABI 04408; 03 ABU DHABI
04792; 03 ABU DHABI 04845; 03 ABU DHABI 05031

E.O. 12958: N/A
TAGS: [KPAO](#) [CVIS](#) [CMGT](#) [PREL](#) [TC](#)
SUBJECT: YOU LOSE ONE, YOU LOSE THEM ALL - UAE STUDENTS
CONTINUE TO AVOID THE US DUE TO VISA AND BORDER PROCEDURES.

SENSITIVE BUT UNCLASSIFIED

¶1. (U) SUMMARY: AS PART OF THE MISSION'S OUTREACH EFFORTS,
PAO, CONOFF AND PAO CULTURAL SPECIALIST VISITED THE TRAINING
AND SCHOLARSHIPS DEPARTMENT OF THE ABU DHABI INVESTMENT
AUTHORITY (ADIA), WHICH MANAGES ABU DHABI'S LARGE OVERSEAS
INVESTMENT PORTFOLIO AND IS THE LARGEST SCHOLARSHIP PROVIDER
FOR UAE CITIZENS. EMBASSY STAFF DISCUSSED IMPROVEMENTS IN US

VISA AND BORDER PROCESSING AND OFFERED ASSISTANCE TO PROSPECTIVE STUDENTS AND THEIR PARENTS. OUR ADIA INTERLOCUTORS POINTED OUT THAT SCHOLARSHIPS TO THE US ARE HEADED FOR ANOTHER HISTORIC LOW. THEY BLAME MISPERCEPTIONS AND DIFFICULTIES WITH VISA AND BORDER POLICIES THAT THEY SAY DISSUADE UAE STUDENTS FROM CHOOSING THE US DESPITE RECENT IMPROVEMENTS TO US VISA AND BORDER POLICIES. END SUMMARY.

CONTINUING OUTREACH AND DIALOGUE

12. (U) ON TUESDAY, MARCH 30, 2004, PAO, CONOFF, AND PAO CULTURAL SPECIALIST MET THE LEADERSHIP OF ADIA'S TRAINING AND SCHOLARSHIPS DEPARTMENT. REPRESENTATIVES PRESENT AT THE MEETING INCLUDED AHMED SHABEEB AL DHAHERI, EXECUTIVE DIRECTOR AND UAE FEDERAL NATIONAL COUNCIL MEMBER, DR. AHMAD BADR, ASSISTANT MANAGER AND AN AMERICAN CITIZEN, AND DR. ABDELKADER ZEROUGUI, ACADEMIC ADVISOR FOR THE US AND WHO SPENT OVER 20 YEARS STUDYING AND WORKING IN THE US. ADIA AWARDED APPROXIMATELY 150 FULL-RIDE SCHOLARSHIPS IN 2003 TO UAE CITIZENS FROM ALL EMIRATES.

13. (U) CONOFF EXPLAINED IMPROVEMENTS IN VISA AND BORDER PROCESSING, INCLUDING REVISIONS TO THE NATIONAL SECURITY ENTRY/EXIT REGISTRATION SYSTEM (NSEERS), BIOMETRIC COLLECTIONS FOR US VISA APPLICANTS, AND THE START OF THE US-VISIT PROGRAM. PAO REITERATED THE USG'S COMMITMENT TO OPEN AND SECURE BORDERS AND RECOMMENDED THAT SCHOLARSHIP OFFICERS, STUDENTS, AND PARENTS CONTACT PAO OR CONSULAR STAFFS WITH QUESTIONS ON VISA AND BORDER PROCEDURES AND STUDYING IN THE US.

BATTLING MISPERCEPTIONS AND DELAYS

14. (SBU) DR. BADR REPLIED THAT STUDENT APPLICATIONS TO THE US CONTINUE TO FALL. THIS YEAR, ADIA AWARDED ONLY 12 SCHOLARSHIPS TO THE US WITH POSSIBLY 28 ADDITIONAL SCHOLARSHIPS TO THE US AFTER FINAL GRADES ARE AWARDED IN JUNE. BEFORE SEPTEMBER 11TH, ADIA FUNDED APPROXIMATELY 1300 STUDENTS IN THE US. THE TOTAL IS NOW 350, WITH ABOUT 100 GRADUATING THIS YEAR AND ONLY 40 REPLACING THEM.

15. (U) COMMENT: OVERALL, ADIA WILL ONLY AWARD 150 SCHOLARSHIPS THIS YEAR FOR ALL COUNTRIES, A SIGNIFICANT DECREASE FROM PREVIOUS YEARS. THIS IS MOST LIKELY DUE TO SEVERAL FACTORS: (1) SIGNIFICANT IMPROVEMENTS TO THE UAE'S SYSTEM OF HIGHER EDUCATION; (2) AN INCREASE IN THE NUMBER OF AMERICAN AND WESTERN UNIVERSITIES OPENING SATELLITE FACILITIES IN THE FREE ZONES, SUCH AS AT DUBAI'S KNOWLEDGE VILLAGE; (3) AN INCREASE IN THE NUMBER OF SCHOLARSHIPS PROVIDED BY OTHER GOVERNMENT ENTITIES AND NATIONAL CORPORATIONS; AND (4) A REDUCTION IN ADIA'S GENERAL INVESTMENT INCOME SINCE 2001. END COMMENT.

16. (SBU) DR. BADR DISAGREED WITH IMPROVEMENTS TO THE VISA PROCESS, AS MOST ADIA STUDENTS WAIT LONGER THAN TWO MONTHS. IN SOME CASES, ADIA STUDENTS WAITED 8 AND 9 MONTHS, WHICH DISCOURAGED FAMILY MEMBERS AND FRIENDS AS WELL. DR. BADR ASSERTED THAT STUDENTS SHOULD BE REFUSED RATHER WAIT. THIS IS PROBABLY BETTER FOR THE US AS WELL, HE ADDED, AS AT LEAST THE STUDENT'S ANGER AT BEING DENIED WOULD NOT SPREAD TO FRIENDS AND FAMILY MEMBERS, WHO ALSO PUT THEIR LIVES ON HOLD WHILE THE STUDENT WAITS.

17. (SBU) AS A RESULT, DR. ZEROUGUI EXPLAINED THAT PARENTS DO NOT WANT TO WAIT TO SEND THEIR CHILDREN TO THE US IF STUDENTS RECEIVE VISAS TO THE UK, CANADA, OR AUSTRALIA IN A WEEK. THIS APPLIES ESPECIALLY TO THE PUBLIC SCHOOL STUDENTS, WHO AWAIT THEIR FINAL GRADES IN JUNE. THEY SIMPLY DO NOT HAVE TIME TO WAIT FOR A VISA LIKE THEIR COUNTERPARTS IN PRIVATE SCHOOLS, WHO STUDY ENGLISH FULL TIME, TAKE THE SAT IN THE WINTER OR SPRING, AND START THE APPLICATION AND VISA PROCESSES EARLIER.

18. (SBU) DR. BADR ALSO DESCRIBED THE PROBLEMS FACING CURRENT STUDENTS IN THE US. HE EXPLAINED THAT MANY UAE STUDENTS BEGIN IN AN ENGLISH PROGRAM OR COMMUNITY COLLEGE PRIOR TO JOINING A

UNIVERSITY OR COLLEGE. MANY ARE SCARED THAT THEY WILL NOT GET A NEW VISA OR BE ALLOWED TO RETURN. THUS, THESE STUDENTS ARE ALSO CHOOSING TO APPLY TO OTHER COUNTRIES TO AVOID PROBLEMS.

¶9. (SBU) MR. AL DHAHERI STATED THAT STUDENTS' TREATMENT AT PORTS-OF-ENTRY (POES) AND NSEERS PROCEDURES ARE STILL THE MOST DIFFICULT CHALLENGES. FEW UNDERSTAND NSEERS REQUIREMENTS, WHICH ARE NOT APPLIED CONSISTENTLY AT POES. THE INTRODUCTION OF THE US-VISIT PROGRAM WORSENERD THIS PROBLEM, AS MANY BELIEVE THAT IT REPLACED NSEERS. UAE STUDENTS ARE STILL DETAINED ON ARRIVAL, QUESTIONED, THEIR VISAS ARE CANCELLED, AND THEY ARE RETURNED TO THE UAE. HE NOTED FRANKLY "IF YOU LOSE ONE STUDENT, YOU LOSE THEM ALL - FATHERS, MOTHERS, SISTERS, BROTHERS, COUSINS, FAMILY MEMBERS AND FRIENDS - YOU LOSE THEM ALL." INDEED, HIS COMMENTS MIRRORED THE LARGE "CANCELLED STUDENTS - USA" FILES IN THE ADIA LIBRARY VERSUS THE LEAN "CURRENT STUDENTS - USA" FILE NEXT TO IT.

NOT GETTING CREDIT FOR SEVERAL IMPROVEMENTS

¶10. (U) CONOFF REPLIED THAT NSEERS VIOLATORS COULD RE-APPLY FOR A VISA. IN FACT, THE EMBASSY IN ABU DHABI HAS RECEIVED VISA APPLICATIONS FROM 5 NSEERS VIOLATORS. ALL WERE APPROVED FOR A NEW VISA, AS STUDENTS SIMPLY MISUNDERSTOOD THE NSEERS PROCEDURES. PAO REMARKED THAT THE PAO AND CONSULAR STAFFS ARE WILLING TO EXPLAIN THE PROCESSES TO ANYONE. IF DESIRED, PAO STAFF WILL FACILITATE DIGITAL VIDEO CONFERENCES BETWEEN CA, DHS, EDUCATORS, AND UAE STUDENTS IN THE US TO EASE CONCERNS, AS WAS DONE RECENTLY AT ZAYED UNIVERSITY IN ABU DHABI.

¶11. (U) COMMENT: THE NUMBER OF UAE STUDENTS GOING TO THE US IS STILL A DECLINING TREND. IN ABU DHABI, 70 UAE STUDENTS WERE ISSUED VISAS FOR THE SPRING 2004 SEMESTER, AND SO FAR, 12 UAE STUDENTS WERE ISSUED VISAS FOR FALL 2004. THIS IS A COMMON TREND IN THE REGION. THE MAIN PROBLEM, THESE AND OTHER SCHOLARSHIP OFFICERS CLAIM (SEE REFTELS), IS THAT BAD RUMORS HOLD AND SPREAD FASTER THAN GOOD PRESS AND EXPERIENCE. A FEW CASES OF A LENGTHY VISA DELAY OR RUDE TREATMENT AT A US POE HAVE COME TO BE SEEN AS UNIVERSAL TRUTH EVEN IF PROCESSING TIME IS REDUCED AND ONLY 5 UAE NATIONALS HAVE APPLIED FOR A NEW NONIMMIGRANT VISA DUE TO AN NSEERS VIOLATION.

¶12. (SBU) THERE IS ALSO HOPE FOR THE FUTURE. DR. BADR, MR. AL DHAHERI AND DR. ZEROUGUI ALL NOTED THAT "99.9 PERCENT" OF UAE STUDENTS AND PARENTS INITIALLY CHOOSE THE US BEFORE ANY OTHER COUNTRY." THIS SENTIMENT MIRRORS THE PUBLIC COMMENTARY OF RULING FAMILY MEMBERS IN BOTH ABU DHABI AND DUBAI, PARTICULARLY THAT OF SHEIKH NAHYAN BIN MUBARAK AL NAHYAN, THE POPULAR MINISTER OF HIGHER EDUCATION, WHO SENDS HIS SONS TO THE US FOR THEIR EDUCATION. TO BUILD UPON THIS COMMENTARY AND ENCOURAGE MORE STUDENTS TO CHOOSE THE US, WE ARE CONTINUING OUR OUTREACH TO INFORM PROSPECTIVE STUDENTS, PARENTS, AND GOVERNMENT AND SCHOLARSHIP OFFICIALS OF CHANGES IN VISA AND BORDER PROCEDURES AND DISPEL RUMORS. END COMMENT.

WAHBA